Notes from *Crucial Conversations*

1. **Definition of a crucial conversation:**
   A discussion between two or more people where: (a) stakes are high, (b) opinions vary, and (c) emotions run strong.

2. **Definition of dialogue:**
   The free flow of meaning between two or more people.

3. **Purpose of dialogue:**
   a. To fill the pool of shared meaning.
   b. The greater the shared meaning in the pool, the better the decision.

4. **Start with yourself – which you can control.**
   a. Ask what you really want (not winning; not revenge; not safety); e.g., for yourself, for others, for the relationship.
   b. Clarify what you don’t want.
   c. Present your brain with a more complex problem/creative solution: an *and* vs. an *either/or* – e.g., is there a way to say what you need without coming across as demanding and self-righteous? Or, can you tell the truth and not insult anyone?
   d. Learn to look/know when you are in a crucial conversation.
   e. Are you behaving like what you really want?

5. **Notice when:**
   a. Safety is at risk: *Silence* (withholding meaning from the pool) or *violence* (forcing meaning into the pool). Stop and make it safe.
   b. Silence: Masking, avoiding, and withdrawing.
   c. Violence: Controlling, labeling, and attacking.

6. **Making it safe.**
   a. Find a mutual purpose: Do others believe you care about their goals?
   b. Mutual respect: Do others believe you respect them?
   c. Step out/stop when mutual respect or purpose are at risk.
      i. Apologize
      ii. Contrast: a do-don’t statement – e.g., I don’t want to suggest it’s your fault.
         What I’d like to do is find the cause of the problem and help us find a solution.
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iii. CRIB:
   1. Commit to seek mutual purpose: Agree to agree
   2. Recognize the purpose behind the strategy: Don’t equate what you’re asking for with what you want
   3. Invent a mutual purpose: A higher level/more encompassing goal
   4. Brainstorm new strategies

7. **Mastering stories – Staying in dialogue while scared, angry or hurt**
   a. Retrace your steps in the path from feelings to action: see/hear (data and sensations) → tell a story → feel → act
   b. Resist dangerous stories:
      i. Victim: “It’s not my fault.”
      ii. Villain: “It’s all your fault.”
      iii. Helpless: “There’s nothing else I can do.”
   c. Changing the discourse:
      i. Turn victims into actors.
      ii. Turn villains into humans.
      iii. Turn helpless into ables.
      iv. Tell the rest of the story; e.g., my role, what I want, what I would do if I acted like what I want.
   d. STATE: A tool for getting your meaning a fair hearing:
      i. Share your facts: Observable; not controversial
      ii. Tell your story: What you are beginning to conclude
      iii. Ask for others’ path: Ask for others’ facts and conclusions
      iv. Talk tentatively: Differentiate your facts from the story you’ve constructed
      v. Encourage testing: Ask for different meanings, opposing views; play devil’s advocate
   e. Communication tools for getting others to share their path:
      i. Ask to get things rolling
      ii. Mirror to confirm feelings
      iii. Paraphrase
      iv. Prime: If everything else fails, pour some meaning into the pool
   f. Moving on after the stories:
      i. Agree when you do
      ii. Build on what has been said; add what’s missing or needs adding
      iii. Compare (Confront): Explore and explain differences

8. **From dialogue to action**
   a. Decide how to decide by attending to:
      i. Who cares/will be impacted?
      ii. Who knows/has expertise?
      iii. Who must agree/has authority/can block?
      iv. How many people is it worth involving without leaving a blocker out?

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1 See also The Ladder of Inference
Notes from *Crucial Conversations*

b. Four types of decision-making:
   i. Command: Explain why; explain which elements are flexible; don’t overuse
   ii. Consult: Don’t consult if you’ve made up your mind; announce what you are doing; report back your decision
   iii. Vote: Creates winners and losers; don’t cop-out by voting
   iv. Consensus: Don’t apply to everything, don’t pretend everyone will get first choice, don’t take turns, commit to support the decision and outcomes no matter what, have a fall-back if time is an issue.

c. Finish with who, what, by when; i.e., an action plan, plus follow-up.
   i. Record the decision and agreements

9. **Coaching summary**
   a. Start with heart: What do I want/don’t want; refuse “the Sucker’s choice.”
   b. Learn to look for when the conversation becomes crucial: For safety, for your style under stress.
   c. Make it safe: Apologize; Contrast; CRIB (commit, recognize, invent, brainstorm)
   d. Master your stories: Retrace path to action, separate facts from stories, watch for clever stories, tell the rest of the story.
   e. **STATE** your story: Share facts, tell your story, ask for others’ path, talk tentatively, encourage testing.
   f. Explore others’ path: Ask, mirror, paraphrase, prime: Agree, Build, Compare.
   g. Move to action: Decide how to decide, use appropriate decision-making style, document decision and action plan, follow up.

10. **Important tips – Yeah, but…**
    a. Hold crucial conversations with teammates that don’t come through on team agreements: Don’t leave it to the boss.
    b. As leader, ask for feedback from peers, not subordinates, when you experience deference. Hold crucial conversations with direct reports when you have more data on your behavior.
    c. If others don’t want to talk about the tough issues, make it safe by establishing a compelling mutual purpose.
    d. When actions are both subtle and unacceptable, retrace your “path to action” to put your finger on what others are doing that’s problematic. If there are no facts or consequences, *work on your tolerance*.
    e. When others don’t meet your expectations, clarify them or establish new and higher ones.
    f. Learn to look for patterns, not the one instance; e.g., coming late vs. failing to live up to commitments made.
    g. If one needs time out, come to mutual agreement about it and commitment to resume conversation at another time.
    h. Show zero tolerance for insubordination: Speak up immediately and respectfully. Catch disrespect before it turns into abuse and insubordination.
    i. Emotions: Your ability to pull yourself out of the content of a discussion and focus on the process is inversely proportional to your level of emotion.